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SUBJECT: CUBA: SPAIN CONFIDENT IT CAN OVERTURN EU MEASURES
ON SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathy Fitzpatrick; reason 1.5 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary. Spain is determined to roll back key elements of the June 2003 EU "restrictive measures" on Cuba implemented in the wake of Castro's crackdown on the opposition. MFA officials are confident they have sufficient support within the EU to do so. The GOS counts the UK, France, Sweden, Greece, Belgium, Austria, and Finland allies in their efforts to abolish the policy requiring EU missions to invite dissidents to national day celebrations. Deputy Foreign Minister Bernardino Leon told visiting EUR DAS Glyn Davies that Spain wants to reestablish contacts with GOC officials in order to be able to influence the post-Castro leadership. MFA Director General for Latin America Javier Sandomingo will travel to Cuba on 10/27, in part to explain Spain's initiative to the dissident community. Sandomingo would like to brief USG officials in Washington as well, perhaps in late November. Popular Party members are critical of Zapatero's approach on Cuba, but do not seem to have the political weight to rein in GOS policy on Cuba.

2. (C) Madrid cannot be moved on this issue. We believe the only way to blunt Spain's ambitions on EU Cuba policy is to energize Cuba critics within the EU, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, in order to prevent an EU consensus in Brussels in favor of Spain's new approach. End Summary.

//SPAIN SHIFTS EMPHASIS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY TO CUBAN GOVERNMENT//

3. (C) Shortly after Zapatero came to office, MFA and other government officials indicated they wanted to take a "new" approach on Cuba out of frustration with their lack of access to Cuban Government interlocutors. They blamed the June 2003 EU measures in support of Cuban dissidents -- especially the policy of inviting dissidents to EU national day celebrations -- as a major impediment to normal diplomatic relations with the GOC. Deputy FM Leon told EUR DAS Davies on 10/19 that Spain wants to eliminate the EU policy on invitations in order to regain access to, and perhaps influence, GOC officials who could lead Cuba once Castro is gone. Leon said Spain's objective is to prevent chaos in Cuba in the post-Castro era. He told Davies that MFA Director General for Latin America Sandomingo would travel to Cuba soon and would also like to visit Washington at a later date to brief USG officials. Davies underscored USG policy on Cuba and warned against policies that would allow Castro to simply eat "carrots" handed him by foreign interlocutors without requiring Castro to ease political and economic restrictions.

//MFA - EU MEASURES WERE "A MISTAKE FROM THE START"//

4. (C) Poloff met with MFA Deputy Director General for the Caribbean Pablo Gomez de Olea on 10/21 to get a readout on the 10/19 EU Latin American Committee (COLAT) meeting on Cuba and to express USG concern regarding the direction of GOS policy towards Cuba. Gomez said that, contrary to press reports, the COLAT meeting had gone well from Spain's perspective. The GOS had not expected a vote on its proposal to "modify" the June 2003 measures on Cuba and was content with the COLAT's decision to request input from resident EU missions in Havana for a November 16 discussion. Gomez listed the UK, France, Sweden, Greece, Belgium, Austria and Finland as strong backers of the Spanish proposal.

5. (C) In an effort to block new EU members states viewed as hostile to Cuba from scuttling Madrid's plans, Spain asked that only countries with an embassy in Cuba (i.e. - those affected by the Cuban "freezout" of EU diplomats) vote on whether to eliminate the invitation of dissidents to national day events. Poloff noted that Finland - a GOS supporter on Cuba - has no embassy in Havana, while the Czech Republic and Poland do have missions in Havana and could have a different view. Gomez said Poland and the Czech Republic are coming around to Spain's view on the issue.

6. (C) Gomez, a holdover from the Aznar administration, complained that the 2003 EU measures were "a mistake from the

start" and argued that even had the Popular Party (PP) won the March elections the GOS would still seek to roll them back. He said the Greek EU Presidency had rammed the measures through in 2003 without proper consideration and without leaving the EU an exit strategy in case the measures backfired. Gomez said that the EU should simply have enacted the measures without announcing them and should have made the invitation of dissidents voluntary in order to leave EU missions some wiggle room. He said it was regrettable that some EU missions had broken EU discipline by canceling national day events in order to avoid conflict with the GOC, citing Austria as a particularly egregious example.

//SPAIN STILL CARES ABOUT THE OPPOSITION, BUT...//

17. (C) Poloff said the USG has significant reservations about the change in Spanish policy towards Cuba, fearing Castro will interpret it as a victory for Cuban intransigence on human rights. Gomez insisted that Spain remains committed to pressing for improvements in Cuba's human rights practices. He reiterated previous assertions that Spain's plans including ramped up contacts with the opposition in meetings other than national day events. He said DG Sandomingo's primary reason for going to Cuba on 10/27 is to meet with the opposition and seek their understanding with respect to Spain's new direction. He asserted that most dissidents had already indicated their acceptance of Spain's rationale, with only "right wing" activists Oswaldo Paya and Martha Beatriz Roque refusing to budge in part because the GOS had failed to engage them sufficiently on the issue. Poloff challenged Gomez on this point, noting that center-left activist Vladimiro Roca had recently sent a scathing letter to the GOS accusing Spain of abandoning the opposition. Gomez said the Spanish Embassy in Havana had spoken with Roca and convinced him of Spain's good intentions. (NOTE: In a separate meeting, the brother of Oswaldo Paya told poloff that Sandomingo had asked him in August how Paya would view the termination of invitations to national day events. The brother responded that Paya would reject the shift in policy, since it was the EU's only concrete measure in support for pro-democracy activists in Cuba. END NOTE.)

18. (C) Poloff noted FM Moratinos' recent comments to the press suggesting that Spain's policy shift had led to the release of seven jailed dissidents since mid 2004, saying the USG saw no connection between Spanish diplomacy and the release of the dissidents. Gomez replied that Moratinos' comments had been misinterpreted. What he meant to say was that the EU measures had not led to the release of any dissidents and that they were only let go when Spain began speaking of the need for dialogue with the Castro regime. However, Gomez agreed with poloff's point that Castro more likely had his own reasons for releasing the detainees, irrespective of any Spanish initiatives.

19. (C) Asked about Cuban Foreign Minister Perez Roque's recent favorable comments regarding Zapatero's Cuba policy, Gomez said neither the statements of the GOC nor those of the opposition had an influence on Spanish policy. He said Spain feels no sense of urgency and will adjust its Cuba policy at a pace determined by Madrid's long-term objectives in Cuba. Poloff raised rumors circulating through Madrid's exile community that political prisoner Raul Rivero would be released by the GOC in order to reward Zapatero and give him leverage to ease EU policies towards Cuba. Gomez discounted the rumors, saying Rivero is too big a prize for the GOC to release at the moment, given Castro's personal dislike for the jailed poet.

//PP A GADFLY ON CUBA, BUT CAN'T SWAY GOS POLICY//

110. (C) On 10/21, DCM, the political counselor, and poloff met with PP Parliamentarian and chief of the PP's International Affairs Department Jorge Moragas and PP Senator Luis Fraga to discuss foreign policy issues, including Cuba. Moragas, who made front page news in Spain when he was denied entry to Cuba on 10/16 for planning to meet with dissidents, said GOS policy on Cuba is a "disaster." He said Spanish and EU policies may not be able to influence Castro, but they should at the very least fall on the side of a principled defense of human rights. Moragas, who appears close to both PP leader Mariano Rajoy and former President Aznar, favors a "scorched-earth" style of opposition and said the PP would keep Cuba at the forefront of its differences with the Socialist government. He called on the USG to encourage Central European EU members to block Spanish initiatives in Brussels and make clear to Zapatero Washington's differences with Spain on Cuba.

111. (C) Fraga, who is friendly with FM Moratinos and recently traveled with Socialist officials to Chile and Colombia and says he will travel with Zapatero's delegation to the Ibero American Summit in Costa Rica, was more conciliatory, saying he is attempting to broker joint PP-PSOE positions on policy towards Cuba (as well on policy towards relations with the U.S.) He agreed with the GOS thesis that there are figures

within the GOC who could be influenced by Spain, but thought the GOS had taken the wrong approach in adjusting its policy. He said the PP should balance PP "sticks" (i.e. - Moragas) with "carrots" such as his pursuit of a common policy on Cuba. Interestingly, both Fraga and Moragas described MFA officials Sandomingo and Gomez de Olea in favorable terms, saying that GOS direction on Cuba was driven by PSOE operatives around FM Moratinos and President Zapatero. Neither legislator seemed optimistic that the PP would be able to alter Zapatero's Cuba policy.

//COMMENT//

12. (C) We are not going to be able to convince the GOS to refrain from taking the lead within the EU to revamp policy towards Cuba. MFA hands may be counseling a correct diplomatic approach in making this shift, but they nevertheless strongly support the decision to terminate the invitation of dissidents to national day celebrations. We are not swayed by GOS assertions that they will ramp up other contacts with dissidents since there is no reason to believe the Spanish ambassador in Havana would approach such contacts with any enthusiasm.

13. (C) However, Spain's efforts may still be blunted at the EU level if a country such as Poland or the Czech Republic were able to block consensus on Spain's proposals during the November 16 COLAT. Such a loss in momentum might be enough of a setback to convince Zapatero and FM Moratinos that changing EU Cuba policy is not worth the political effort. A loss in Brussels would also open the door for domestic critics of Zapatero's approach towards Cuba, which would act as a further brake on Socialist activism on Cuba.

ARGYROS